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Plain Reasons against joining with the Non sub-  
scribers in their unlimited Scheme of Reli-  
gious Communion.

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BEING AN  
ANSWER  
TO A  
LETTER  
From a GENTLEMAN to a  
Subscribing Minister.

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By WILLIAM HOLMES, M. A.

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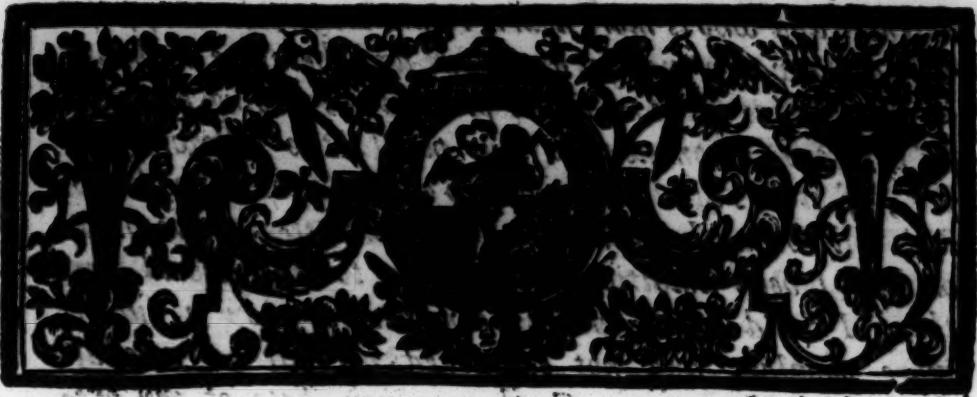
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TO THE  
**CONGREGATION**  
Under the AUTHOR'S  
**Pastoral Care.**

My dear BRETHREN,

**T**HAT it must have been something else than the fond inclination of commencing author, that prevail'd with me to publish the following sheets, you'll readily conclude, when you consider with what industry the letter which I have here examin'd, was propagated among you: and with what other view than to proselitise you to an unknown faith, and withdraw you from my ministry. Was it

is not then high time for some, or other, to interpose in your defence? and who is more nearly related to you than my self? who am a watch-man set over you, and therefore am bound in duty as far as in me lies to prevent the sowing of tares. Wherefore I recommend to your perusal the following paper; if it do's at all contribute to establish you in the faith, it is all the author aims at. Had I any other end in view, or had I been ambitious of offering to the world any thing I could do, I would have wrote upon a subject more popular, and not embarked my self in a cause for which I may expect the common fate of my brethren, that have wrote before me, and that is, to meet with as cramp ybetorick from the populace of the other side as rage and malice can inspire; some of which from my own experience I can say never cease to throw about firebrands, arrows, &c.

But my dear friends, let not these be your methods of defending your religion, least you shou'd lessen if not loose it in the contest. It is not the way for any to gain credit and reputation to a cause, to dispute themselves into a fever; it cou'd never be the design of God, nor yet acceptable to him, that any shou'd contend for his truths at the expence of his laws: therefore all debates manag'd with hard words, hatred and malice, (evils very opposite to christian virtue and the laws of the gospel) plainly shew that all possess'd with such irregular passions give up the cause they plead for. It was when their arguments were spent, and their reasons exhausted that Christ's enemies took up stones to kill him. Yet 'tis too evident to be deny'd that the method this controversy has been by some manag'd in, has had a plain tendency to overthrow the practice of a divine life, even by the over-bated Zeal express'd for divine truths. How many unruly sticklers for truth, or rather unchristian advocates for christianity treat those that differ from them even worse than the arch-angel durst do the devil himself? If our brother differ from us in his sentiments why shou'd we therefore abuse him any more than we wou'd a person differ-

ing in the colour or complexion of the face? shou'd we not rather pity him? and as much sympathize with a person of a disordered mind as of a diseased body? why shou'd either party that have freedom to pray for Pagans, and Mahometans, with the same mouth anathematize their own kindsfolks and countrymen? I speak not this as if I meant to accuse those of our church or you that are my parishioners, who have so generously stood in the gap and sacrificed your peace, quiet and substance, to an excellent cause and truly orthodox and apostolick church. And much less wou'd I be thought hereby to discourage you from being as zealous for the faith and as constant in its defence, as both your duty requires, and, as I bles<sup>s</sup> God, all of you are this day, and I hope and am persuaded will ever be so. But I speak this to beseech and exhort you to adorn your profession by a suitable conversation, and not to suffer your Zeal for your faith ever to carry you to any unchristian or unwarrantable measures in the defence of it, but to live up to the honour of your Church as well as to dispute for it. And now if there be any concern for your church's honour, if any value for your immortal souls, if you desire the blessing of God now, and the benefit of his promise in the world to come, be as good as ye are orthodox, as free from all corruption in your manners as, God be thanked, you are from error in your belief; and as ye are now apparently more concerned for your religion than perhaps any of you have been, so go on in well-doing: grow in grace, and then ye shall also grow in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; which is the sincere desire and ought to be the fervent prayer of

Your Servant for Jesus sake,

William Holmes.





# REMARKS

Upon a LETTER to a

## Subscribing Minister

IN THE

*North of IRELAND.*



**I**N the frontispiece of his letter, the gentleman addresses his friend with a very great air of solemnity: he gives him the last speech, and dying Words of his departing friend upon our late controversies; or as he himself expresses it; *A load of disorders forbids me to expect that I shall continue much longer in this world; and it is now nothing to me. But before I go hence, and be no more, I am willing to give you my last thoughts upon your late controversies.* I hope no thinking reader will be conjur'd into a compliance with him in his sentiments, from all that he has offered of this sort, it being certain that no point of doctrine

trine is to be try'd by such a standard as the opinion of dying men: it is certain that men of the opposite side of the question expect to die as well as he, and it is certain that men do not become infallible whenever loaded with disorders, but it's very possible that a man in his very last gasps may assert wrong principles: so that these sorry pleas are arguments with me only that they who use them apprehend they need them instead of better. He further adds, *And I hope you will charitably believe (I am sure my very heart says its true) that I set me down to do this without being conscious of any partial inclination to, or prejudice against any party.* The whole is, I assure you, I think I speak truth; but to what purpose is this? for the certainty of this proposition depends upon the certainty of the former, and both upon the veracity of the person that speaks them, and so can give no additional strength to what is before affirmed, for a hundred assertions of the truth of what I say, will never alter the nature of things, so as to turn truth into falsehood, or fable into gospel.

Before I proceed any farther in the controversy I can't but applaud this gentleman for his honest candor in openly avowing (what others for some time were willing to keep as a secret,) that the *Nonsubscribers* were for universal communion with all that give themselves the name of christians, how dangerous soever be the errors they maintain. We from the beginning were under some fears that it was this they were driving at, but durst hardly say so, least we shou'd be branded with the odious name of *uncharitable biggots*. Yea, when a gentleman of worth of this church, but said that their principles and reasoning had this tendency, they loudly cry'd out against him and were for prosecuting him as a defamer. But perhaps things were not ripe for their owning such a principle then; their people were not prepar'd for digesting it at that time of day; I believe indeed it wou'd have gone but very ill down even with those who are most attach'd to them now, had they been but a very few years

agone

agone made to believe that this lay at the bottom, that this the *Nonsubscribers* were aiming at. But now things being better ripened, and the populace better prepar'd to receive it, this gentleman opens the scene and sets *New-light* in a clearer light than any who came before him ; he will not, as others have done, trifle with us, or conceal himself under any vain subterfuges, but freely avow that he will keep communion with all denominations of christians. Tho' sometimes he delivers himself in such abstruse and general phrases, that 'tis hard to find out his drift or meaning ; yet in the main that he has reduc'd the controversie to this narrow point, is evident from the whole of his reasoning, as well as from the very stating of the question in debate in these words ;

*Whether any test of orthodoxy beside the holy scriptures ought to be impos'd as a term of communion ; and whether a profession of receiving the Scriptures as the word of God, and the christian faith as reveal'd in them, does not intitle a man to communion christian and ministerial, if no objections lie against him in other respects ? the negative of this (says he) has been warmly pleaded, the truth I humbly think lies on the other side.* The author's side of the question when reduc'd to an assertion amounts to this, viz. *That we are bound to keep communion christian and ministerial with all that profess to believe that the scripture is the word of God ;* but if it be so then we must keep communion with the *Arians, Sabellians, Socinians, Quakers, Papists, and a hundred others ; in a word with all mankind but a Pagan, Mahometan, Deist, and Jew, why ? because all will take the Test, and own the scriptures by bulk to be the word of God.* But what kind of *Babel-like* confusion should this make, or what end cou'd be gain'd by this agreement in sounds only, where men so widely differ in the sense and meaning of the words they speak ? surely none other but a union of heresies at the sad ex-

pence of truth. According to such principles we must break down the walls of the church that we may enlarge its doors, so that it éou'd no longer be a hedged vineyard, or a fenced city ; but thus fapp'd and undermin'd become a ruinous heap.

But let us suppose the terms to be as *catholick* as this gentleman wou'd have them, and in consequence thereof that all comers and goers without asking any further questions, were received into either christian or ministerial communion ; the result of this wou'd be, that the honest hearted People wou'd have their ears constantly grated with false doctrine ; they wou'd hear an *Arian* blaspheming Christ in the one part of the day, a *Papist* preaching up superstition and idolatry in the other, and perhaps not hear an orthodox sermon in their lifetime ; or if they did once, or seldom hear the truth preach'd, they wou'd soon hear it contradicted. And as in preaching, so in prayer ; one wou'd pray for the success of popery, the next for the downfal of antichrist in the same day, and out of the same pulpit ; in such a case how cou'd the people join in the publick prayers, and mock God by constantly pleading for and against the same things ? this coalition of heresies wou'd make so sad a confusion in the church, that I can't think the God of order wou'd ever approve of it ; and that because this wou'd keep in the bosom of the church, those whom by the laws of the gospel we are commanded to exclude, or if we can't do that, to separate from. A popish idolater will come up to these terms, and yet we are commanded to *come out from* such idolaters, *least we partake with them in their sins*. The scripture says *an heretick after the first and second admonition reject* ; but our *Nonsubscribers* say, *retain him*, provided he allow the scriptures to be the word of God, let the notions he has fixed upon them be what they may ; nor can I find out any good reason why he wou'd

not

not keep communion with those that deny the scriptures to be the word of God, seeing he can have religious fellowship with those that have false apprehensions of any or every particular doctrine therein contain'd. For where is the difference between holding truth to be falsehood, and holding a false meaning of truth ? he that can receive the one, with what good grace he can exclude the other, I can't apprehend, for both equally deny the truth, and oppose the genuine doctrine of the scriptures.

Once more, when we have brought into the bosom of the church, men of all sects and denominations that will say the scriptures are the word of God, it wou'd be a little difficult to find out what is to be their religion ; I am convinc'd it wou'd puzzle the *Athenian society*, were they now in being to inform us. 'Tis true it might be called the *Catholick Church*, for it wou'd be very universal, but it cou'd never be called the *Holy Catholick Church* when made up of such a medley of errors.

But however inconsistent with reason and the rules of religion this assertion may appear to me, he goes on to strengthen it with the following reasons.

*First, (says he) if any such formula beside the scriptures had been necessary, our Saviour wou'd not have omitted to have given us one.* To which I reply, that whatever *formula* our Saviour wou'd have given us wou'd have been scripture, and seeing there are so many that pervert the scriptures, and *bold the truths of God in unrighteousness*, this *formula* wou'd also have been perverted, and put upon the rack until different meanings were extorted from it, and therefore it wou'd have been still necessary to make use of human words, to let the world know in what sense we held that *formula*. But you'll say, may not human *formula's* be perverted, and false meanings drawn from them ? 'tis true

they may; but whenever we find erroneous persons sheltering themselves under the false glosses they put upon them, we are at liberty to alter our *formula* and add to it such propositions as are most opposite to their errors, but we may not make so free with the scriptures. This was the constant practice of the primitive churches, and we find by experience that such methods have often answer'd their end in detecting and convicting men of errors, and there is no reasoning against experience.

Besides, a *formula* of divine Institution, had it been so indisputable that none cou'd have controverted any principle in it, but must of necessity have received it in its own just meaning, why then there wou'd be no virtue in believing, because no possibility of doing otherwise; so that the wisdom of God did not think fit to give us an indisputable *formula*, because this wou'd be to alter our condition and circumstances from what God intended us to be, *viz.* creatures in a state of trial, capable of rewards, or punishments, according to the good or bad use we shou'd make of divine revelation. But if this *formula* were such as men might mistake, as they do the other scriptures to their own destruction, then such a *formula* cou'd not be a *test* of orthodoxy, because it wou'd be the matter in debate, and so cou'd not end the controversy arising about the just meaning of it self; but he farther adds,

*We meet with one formula in this church, with another in that; now cou'd our saviour intend this, did he design such different terms of communion, wou'd he not have the terms to be the same in every church? if any confession had been at all necessary, wou'd be not given us one universally indisputable?*

But what do's all this lay against orthodox confessions? shall we not have good terms of communion because others have false and unscriptural ones? shall we not maintain truth because others maintain falsehood

falshood and error? will we not contend for the faith of the gospel because others contend for unscriptural traditions? if this be a good reason why we are not to have formula's expressive of our just meaning of the scriptures, because others have erroneous ones, will not the argument be equally good that we must not preach the truths of Christ in our pulpits because others preach error and falshood? nay will it not be as forcible (if it be an argument at all) against the scriptures, as against human formula's? might he not with equal strength have reasoned thus? " we find one sense and meaning of the scriptures in this church, with another in that, now cou'd our saviour design this, wou'd he not have the sense to be the same in every church? and seeing the sense is not the same in every church, the scriptures are not necessary; for if they had, he wou'd have given us a bible universally indisputable." If the argument be good in the other case, it must have the same force in this, and amount to this much, that seeing the bible is abus'd and men have not the same way of thinking about it in every church, therefore we must have no bible at all.

*Remarks on Argument 2d, viz.*

*That human formula's do not answer the end you mean to serve by them, that is, no doubt to preserve the christian religion in its genuine purity, and the christian world from the unhappy influences of error.*  
 To which I answer, that tho' there be no infallible method of preserving christian purity, yet 'tis our duty to fall in with whatever method is most effectual to answer so good an end. Now the methods pretended are, not to declare at all, or (which is much the same) to declare in scriptural words, and to declare in human words our sense of the scriptures, I shall consider which of these

these is the most effectual for preserving the christian religion from the unhappy influences of error.

*First*, To declare in scriptural words, can never be the way to preserve the purity of the christian religion, for by this means the greatest hereticks will have access into the most orthodox churches ; for instance, a *Papist* and a *Protestant* will agree very well in sounds, when they read over together these scriptural words, *this is my body, this is my blood*. Shall we therefore say they have the same way of thinking about the sacrament of the Lord's-supper, because they agree that these were the words of the scripture ? no, they largely differ in the sense and meaning of these words when they come to explain themselves. When a *Socinian* and a *Calvinist* subscribe the same passage of the holy oracles, what is it that is testify'd thereby ? surely not an agreement in the belief of any doctrine, not the remotest conformity in sentiments, but an agreement in words without a meaning, a union in letters and syllables. They will both declare their opinion of Christ in these scriptural words, *John 1. 3.* I believe that *all things were made by him, and that without him was not made any thing that was made.* Is then their faith concerning Christ the same ? no, the one understands the words of his creating the old world, the other of his reforming the new. An *Arian* will confess in the same language, and yet believe Christ to be a meer creature. So that declaring in scriptural words can give no security of any man's soundness in the faith, for this is what the greatest heretick may give into, and maintain his heresy never the less ; for he will still pretend that his is the opinion supported by scripture, and so will own that scripture that supports it.

From this we may be assured that in the mouths of different persons, the phrases of the scripture are ambiguous and differently understood. But whatever may happen, yet I have no such ground to suspect that the like hath actually happened with respect to our *Confessions of Faith*, (and whenever we find it otherwise we shall take care to prevent it in time to come, by altering the words they apply to contradictory meanings or putting in those of a more determinate signification in their room) on the contrary I find hereticks will not subscribe them, because they think them contradictory to their principles, and can't so easily please themselves with an evasive distinction; and therefore I see that in so far they gain their end, and consequently are a more effectual method of promoting truth and purity, than the scheme, that can give no satisfaction to any person even of the strongest credulity. For how can we know a mans principles that will not declare at all? or how can we trust to a declaration that we are sure is deceitful? let none apprehend that from what has been said, I do in the least derogate from the perspicuity, or perfection of the scriptures; this I own in the strongest and fullest terms; and therefore will never receive any human creeds in opposition to them, but only value them so far as they are the sense and meaning of the scriptures, which only are the perfect rule of faith and manners. God himself appointed fallible teachers in his church to explain the scriptures by human words, and vindicate them from the false glosses others put upon them; yet I am persuaded he never intended this shou'd be made an argument against their perspicuity or perfection. Wherefore I only claim a right to what I have commission for, viz. to explain them, but so as to keep the sense and meaning of them; and to do this does not lessen the perfection of the scriptures, neither does it, to give the true sense of them in our confessions

confessions of faith, which we only prize so far as they are, or we can see them founded upon them.

But I shall proceed to consider what he farther offers for the support of his plea in this point. *The only good method (says he) of maintaining and propagating truth, is to set the evidences of it in a fair light, it will thus prevail, and error will lose ground: let a man's mind be convinc'd by reason and he will not need a vote.* The import of this is that the Subscribers do not set the evidences of truth in a clear light, nor take the rational methods of convincing a man's judgment; he must mean this if he intends any thing to the purpose at all; but how justly, I appeal to the impartial world. Have we not published our principles in our *Confession of Faith*, and proved them, as we think, and attested them by scripture? if we have not there set the evidences of truth in a fair light, we shall own our highest obligations to him if he will set them in a fairer: if we maintain any falsehood or error, let him shew us our mistake, so as to convince our judgment, and we profess our selves ready to renounce it. I could wish he wou'd lay himself as open to conviction as we have done, by publishing his principles, and the evidence he has to defend them, then we wou'd either be of one mind with him if convinc'd, or if not, we wou'd save no pains to have him brought to a better understanding.

Farther, he expostulates, *what method any of us wou'd take to gain a Pagan or Mahometan to the faith of the gospel? wou'd we not endeavour to convince his mind of the truth of it? wou'd we not in the best manner we cou'd represent the evidences by which it is supported, and then leave him to judge? and if christianity it self is to be thus propagated, it's an odd whim to imagine that the particular principles of it shou'd not in the same manner subsist in the world.* What he wou'd be at is, (in few words) that we are to take

the same method in gaining a *Mahometan* to christianity, that we take in preserving christianity amongst its ministers, and vice versa. I must here largely differ from him, for tho' we never did require subscription to the *Confession* as a term of christian communion, or require it of the undisciplin'd part of mankind, tho' we never pretend to make it a *charm* to convey knowledge, or inspire the ignorant, yet for very different reasons may we expect subscription to it, for the preservation of christian purity, and true religion amongst the *teachers* of it; as I think I have shown, in shewing its expediency and usefulness to that end. But if the method is to be the same in proselyting a *Pagan* or *Mahometan* to the faith of the gospel, that we are to take with an *Infant* into the ministry, it will content me on this part of the argument only to ask if he wou'd receive an ignorant *Pagan* or *Mahometan* into ministerial communion, seeing the terms of communion in both respects are to be the same? and if no more is to be required of *teachers* than of the most ignorant of those that are to be taught? again, if we are to take the same way in propagating christian truth amongst *Pagans* and *Mahometans* that we are to take in preserving its purity among our selves, let us then consider how this gentleman consistently with his principles wou'd deal with a *Pagan*, or a *Mahometan*; his language must be of this sort, Sir, you are in a dangerous state while you suffer your self to be cheated with such delusions. I wou'd out of an affectionate regard to your soul earnestly press you to renounce your fatal mistakes, and embrace the principles of my religion. Well, the *Mahometan* lays him self open to conviction, and is ready to receive any principles more reasonable than his own, as soon as they appear to him to be such, and according to what he wants to know what his principles and his religion are. Why says the Gentleman you shall find my religion



religion in the scriptures, but, replies the Mahometan; the scriptures are so abus'd and adjusted to the different circumstances of learning and controversy, of men and places, that unless you give me your determinate sense of them, I can't know what you profess or believe. But, rejoyns the Non-declarer, I must beg leave to be excus'd for that, mine is an unknown religion; I am under the greatest obligations to keep it as a secret, from the whole world; shou'd you but ask me in what sense I understand any verse of the scriptures, you wou'd be guilty of an unpardonable degree of imposition: nor cou'd I answer you without wounding my own conscience, and offering extreme violence to my christian liberty, whereby I stand, and am resolv'd to stand. I presume, without commenting much upon such an address, it may be easily discerned how little influence this sort of conversation wou'd have upon a Pagan or Mahometan, so as to proselyte him to be knew not what. Now this reasoning must be very just and pertinent, provided, as our author contends, that we are in the same manner, whereby we preservc the purity of christian religion among its ministers, to propagate christian truth among Pagans and Mahometans; and so reciprocally.

Remarks upon Argument 3d, wherein he says;

I never yet saw a substantial answer to this argument, that we have a revelation from God containing all that we are to believe or practise; since the compleating of which God has not interpos'd by an infallible teacher to decide any controversies that have been raised concerning the true sense of any part of it: and if he has not, how comes any man or body of men to have a right of judging for another? why shou'd I judge for you, any more than you for me? what shall we then do? let us enjoy the unity of christians notwithstanding each retains his own opinion. To this I answer, tho' I will not judge for him, yet I have as good a right to judge for my self, as he, or any other. And if I can't in conscience keep communion with a per-

son of such and such principles, looking upon my self bound by the laws of Christ to avoid and separate from him, I cannot but think it wou'd be a denying me the advantage of that christian liberty and private judgment that the gentleman and those of his party so warmly contend for (when it will answer them in any case) to force me, whether my conscience will suffer me or not, to be of his communion. And if every private christian has a right to choose what community he shall associate with, certainly a whole community have the same right to judge and chuse who shall be its members or ministers; if a private person have not a right to refuse being of such or such a communion upon discovered impurities, he must bid an eternal adieu to both conscience and liberty: and it wou'd be very hard to deny the same privilege to a community that every member in it has a just claim to. But to put the matter past dispute, do not the noble *Bereans* judge for themselves whether the doctrine of the apostles was according to the former revelation they had of the mind of God? and this they are commended for, even tho' they were fallible men, and tho' the apostle's doctrine was of divine inspiration. Now we only claim the same right of judging for others as far as their principles may affect us: and this (I think) we may rightly do without the least pretence to infallibility; for in so doing we judge for our selves.

I might have made another very just remark upon this argument, but that he has done it for me in these words, *But you'll say, shall I keep or admit to christian communion a person that errs in what's essential to christianity; that is, one that is no christian at all?* to this he replys, *But do you know what you mean when you pronounce a particular truth essential to christianity or particular error everlastingly of it? who gave you a right to pronounce sentence?*

The native inference from this is, that we ought to keep communion with all mankind, whatever be the principles they maintain, because it wou'd be to

meddle with things too high for us, to pronounce sentence; and if we dare not do this, we dare not deny to keep Christian or ministerial communion with them. Before he wou'd have one term of communion, now he will have none: I wonder he made *the profession of the scriptures to be the word of God* a term of communion before; for here according to him they ought not, unless the belief of them be essential to Christianity, and for any to say so, wou'd be a dangerous piece of presumption. It wou'd be to go out of our sphere in meddling with what did not belong to us. Now how wou'd a person of these principles behave, if a *Fesuir*, or offspring of *Anti-christ*, wou'd desire admission to his communion, or ask the loan of his pulpit? wou'd he refuse him? no certainly for he wou'd not pronounce his errors every<sup>ye</sup> of Christianity, or shou'd one who denies the divinity of Christ, or speaks blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, ask the lame favour, the case wou'd still be the same: and as he wou'd thus treat their erroneous in principle, so must he kindly receive those who are immoral in their practices, for men can easily found their immoral practices upon false principles. I see greater reason to justify the *Synod*, and applaud their conduct than ever, for if there be not now dangerous errors maintain'd amongst the *Non-subscribers* yet, (if they be all of the same mind with this gentleman) either there will be such, or it will not fail upon their parts for they assure us, that whenever men of the worst principles offer themselves to be of their communion, they will chearfully receive them, if they will but call themselves Christians of whatever denomination; and that, becaule they won't pronounce their errors ever<sup>ye</sup> of Christianity. What is this but the highest degree of scepticism? this is to call in question the importance of all the doctrines of the gospel; and to make it a matter of indifferency, what, or how we believe concerning the most important truths of religion.

Remarks upon the fourth and last Argument taken from a  
Comparison of the Inconveniences that attend both  
sides of the question.

Upon his own side he freely owns the inconveniences wou'd be as follow, If the scriptures only were us'd as a test of orthodoxy, it may be pleaded that there wou'd not be that unity of the faith which may be hoped for: probably there wou'd be very considerable diversity in men's sentiments that were joyn'd in the same communion; it might be urged too, that many errors might creep into the church and infect its members: and that it wou'd not be easy to detect the erroneous and to cast them out of the church; possibly errors that some men count over-full of Christianity wou'd be maintain'd and propagated.

These are some of the inconveniences that the author himself seems to own as the just consequences of his opinion: I shall only add a few suplements to what he has said, and shew what a sad train of dismal consequences shou'd be the natural effects of principles of so monstrous an extent.

First, According to this scheme of universal communion he says there wou'd not be that unity of faith which might be hop'd for; to this I add that there cou'd therefore be no such thing as communion at all; for communion without union in the most important truths of Religion implies a flat contradiction: and surely there wou'd be a disagreement in matters of the greatest importance, if such a principle prevail'd.  
 + " for this principle tends to defile and confound all  
 " religious societies, and to destroy the very being of  
 " christian communion, the foundation of which is  
 " laid in one faith, one hope, one baptism; and to com-  
 " pose a monstrous body of *Arians, Socinians, Gno-*  
 " *stics, Antinomians, Pagans, Idolaters, &c.* joyn'd to  
 " such

“ such as are directly opposite to all these ; all which  
 “ blended together are to make up one worshiping  
 “ assembly, that shall eat at the same altar and be  
 “ taught by the same preacher : what is this but to  
 “ jumble together light and darkness ? to make a  
 “ incompunction betwixt God and Belial, to overcloud  
 “ the Glory, and stain the purity of a society, that  
 “ ought to be a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an  
 “ holy nation, a peculiar people call'd out of darkness in-  
 “ to light.” But to be more particular, I shall give  
 the following reasons why I can't fall in with his  
 scheme of universal communion with all denomina-  
 tions of christians or ministers, nor with the author of  
 this principle,

1<sup>st</sup>ly, Because if I receive any person that brings not  
 with him the doctrine of Christ or bid him God speed, I am  
 partaker with him in his evil deeds, and must also bear his  
 punishments, 2 John, ver. 10. and sure that person  
 brings not along with him the doctrine of Christ,  
 who with subtle distinctions explains it away, for in  
 so doing he preaches another gospel, see 2 Thes. 3. 6.

2<sup>dly</sup>, If we ought not to have communion with  
 men of bad morals (and upon this the scripture is  
 very full) so neither ought we to admit into commu-  
 nion men of bad principles, because of their natural  
 tendency to promote immorality : we read, Rom. 1.  
 26. that those that changed the truth into a lye, God  
 gave them up to vile affections. Nor do I know any rea-  
 son why we should not separate from those that  
 receive not the truth at all, as well as from those that  
 have received it but do not obey it.

3<sup>rdly</sup>, In giving into this principle I cou'd not obey  
 the laws of the gospel, I am very expressly com-  
 manded, if any man teach contrary or consent not to the  
 wholesome words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the doctrine  
 that is according to godliness to withdraw from him,  
 1 Tim. 6. 3. compar'd with 7.

4<sup>thly</sup>, Because of the fatal consequences of a  
 church's receiving any ministers among them who  
 maintain

maintain not the purity of the Faith. It is one immediate design of the institution of this sacred office, that thereby the fellowship of the saints in the belief of the same principles of the common salvation, might be gradually advanced and at length perfected. It was for the edifying of the body of Christ till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the son of God, that *be* *genuine* *pastors* *and* *teachers* *in* *his* *church*, Eph. 4:11. <sup>\*</sup>

Now can this end be gained in a church by ministers who do not themselves maintain the unity of the faith, but patronize diversities of opinions even in matters of greatest importance? and how can we be answerable to God and our own consciences, if due care be not taken in this matter, that in such points the pastors of the church speak all the same things? teachers of false doctrine are worse than no teachers at all: for it were better they left the people to themselves, and to their own conduct, than cause them to follow their pernicious ways, and whilst people are under the care of such, they shall be ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth, 2 Tim. 3:7. They can never have their hearts establish'd with grace, whilst carried about with divers and strange doctrines, Heb. 13:9.

The ministrations of such are entirely useless and unprofitable; and, which is worse, they are pernicious. Jer. 23: 26. com. 32. God himself there says of those prophets, that prophecy lies in his name, and cause his people to err; I sent them not nor commanded them, therefore they shall not profit this people at all. And the entertaining such is highly dangerous; for God threatens that in case they did receive such prophets, v. 30, 40, that he wou'd forget and forsake them, and bring an everlasting reproach upon them, and a perpetual shame,

\* Vide Dunlop's Preface.

" even

even though these pretended to speak in the name  
of the lord. not willing to be called members  
in godly; I can't be a member of that universal  
society because I could not joyn wth any part in  
ordaining a man and setting him apart for the  
work of the ministry who is unsound in the faith;  
for this I think wou'd be a great violation of that  
solemn charge given to ministers before God, an-  
gels and men, to lay hands suddenly upon no man.  
Now cou'd any thing be more rash than the li-  
censing, or ordaining a person wch is absolutely  
unqualify'd? and if an ignorant person be unfit to  
teach others, surely so is an heretick so far as he is  
unsound; for let him display as much learning as  
he will, he can never be said to teach the principles  
of the gospel of god, whilst he perverts them to his  
own destruction. I cou'd never recommend such, as  
a messenger of the lord of hosts, or advise the peo-  
ple to seek the dard at his mouth, nor cou'd I pray  
for success to his ministrations, for in so many  
words I would pray for the overthrow of the truths  
of religion. I doul to snap off robes etc. 1400  
schemly. By this principle we must deny all liberty  
of choice to people, that we may give a licentious  
liberty to their ministers; it is the greatest pleasure  
to many publick souls to be joyn'd to a society of  
christians who maintain the unity of the faith, and  
to have access to pure ordinances, and uncorrupted  
doctrine, dispense'd by those who are qualified for  
that office, and have kept themselves free from the  
poison of error; yet by this catholick scheme they  
must be denied that privilege, obliged to pollute  
themselves, by mixing with the impurities of  
a corrupted ministry, and to have their ears grated  
by doctrines which they detest, as pernicious, or  
despise as useless or uncertain; and so they must be  
rob'd of their greatest joy and comfort, or, which  
is the same thing, they must be hindred from using  
what appears to them the necessary means of at-  
taining

taining those benefits, and arriving at a security concerning the faith and qualifications of their teachers. But let the inconveniences be what they will, and magnified as you please, the author has one universal salvo for all, *viz. That a considerable diversity of opinions wou'd be no great evil, where charity prevail'd and men were taught to bear with one another.* But what charity shall I have for men of these considerably different opinions that he will keep communion with? shall I believe them all sound in the faith? if I were such a credulous fool I shou'd have little charity for my self: shall I believe them unsound? this wou'd be no great length to bring me: shall I in charity keep communion with them? for the reasons already given I think the scripture that recommends all reasonable charity discharges me; or otherwise will he have all men to have charity for *Non-declarers*, when none know their principles? then all men must believe them in the right, for to suspect them, is call'd *Breach of Charity*: and if all believe them in the right, all must believe that they have the same way of thinking with themselves in every important article of faith, because all believe themselves in the right: so that a *Socinian* must charitably believe them *Socinians*, an *Enthusiast* must take them for *Enthusiasts*, a *Papist* for *Papists*. Indeed in my humble judgment, if any particular person took the united body to be made of all these different denominations he cou'd not be grossly mistaken, if once men of all, or considerably different opinions were introduced into the church, and we have no grounds to believe that any wou'd be refused access by any exclusive terms they have ever yet given us, for our judgment, or our charity, to work upon.

Once more, because charity is so often and so warmly recommended to us, and we so often upbraided with the want of it, I can't here omit saying something in our own vindication; and that by freely owning that I can't have charity for *Nonsubscribers*, in that large

degree of it that they wou'd recommend, upon these two accounts, tho' I might add many more.

1<sup>st</sup>, Because, tho' they once gave evidences of their soundness in the faith, by declaring their belief of those articles that our church always allow'd to be doctrines of the greatest importance, and subscribing them as the articles of their faith; yet by reasoning oftentimes since against such methods of procedure, 'tis evident they have renounc'd all subscriptions and declarations that they made before, and so leave us as much in the dark as if we had received no satisfaction of them at the first. But this is not all, for

2<sup>dly</sup>, I suppose 'tis too evident to be deny'd, that many of 'em (not to say all) have alter'd their usual *Doxologies* in the conclusion of their prayers, wherein they were wont to ascribe the same *Glorious Perfections* to all the persons of the *Sacred Trinity*; and now do it in such words as will not infer an equality: whether this be fact I submit to their own hearers to be my judges.

This remark makes the deeper impressions upon me when I call to mind that the *Nonsubscribers* in *England* altered their *Doxologies*, and tho' for some time they conceal'd the grounds of their so doing, yet afterwards laid the *Non-declaring* principle aside, as a temporary institution, and avow'd themselves what we wou'd call *Demi-arians*; yea Mr. *Pierce* in his *Western Inquisition*, giving an account of the differences 'twixt *Subscribers* and *Nonsubscribers* gives also the reasons of the alteration of his and his brethren's *Doxologies*, and that because he cou'd not ascribe equal glory to Christ, or to the Holy Ghost, as to the Father. He will not there have Christ to be any more than a *subordinate* and *depending* God, and in pursuance of that justifies another *Nonsubscriber*, in saying that *Christ is God and so is King George*; and of the Holy Ghost he says that he can't find that a *Kingdom is ascribed to him, or glory given him, from the first of Genesis, to the last of the Revelations*. Now, seeing the *Nonsubscribers* in *Ireland* have

have alter'd their usual *Doxologies* as generally receiv'd, and as (I believe) their hearers can testify; if they will assure us they have not done it upon the same accounts, I will then, and not till then charitably believe it. And since they have set themselves at large from our discipline, and can no longer cry out of *Imposition*, I hope they will some way or other free us of those scruples by being full upon this doctrine; and so give us cause to rejoice in their innocence rather than mourn for their guilt.

I proceed to consider the inconveniencies that he supposes attend the other side of the question.

Here he mentions only one, and that is, *If the church have a power to fix and determine the sense of scripture, a power to pronounce things true, and impose them as articles of the christian faith, then we shall by degrees have not only very erroneous creeds enforc'd with anathema's, but we shall have hierarchy, a pope, purgatory, indulgences, and transubstantiation it self, and from the exercise of ecclesiastical power grow to the claim and exercise of all power.* The whole strength of the argument is, that we must have no creeds least we should have erroneous ones, that there must be no power in the church least it become tyrannical and arbitrary. But should we acknowledge that *Confessions* have been sometimes abused, and made the occasion of the evils complain'd of, yet this will be no argument against the use of *Confessions*, and the benefits which may be reap'd by them, because the best and noblest things in the world have had the same fate, and have been perverted by the corruptions of mankind, to the most unworthy purposes. The most meek and peaceable religion that ever appear'd in the world gave rise to the most furious animosities and unnatural cruelties; the great foundation of the gospel, the *Cross of Christ* was to the Jews a *stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness*. Were therefore all these things to be rejected? or cou'd these evils that spring from the depravity and weakness of mankind, be justly attributed to the innocent occasion

absent of them? who, if our nation had been in it, the discovery cou'd ever have found out that the determining for our selves the sense of the scriptures, and making use of human words in doing it, was the plain method of introducing hierarchy or popery? who cou'd have imagin'd that by renouncing the distinguishing principles of Popery we thereby intended to introduce it? that by declaring the pope to be antichrist (as our Confession terms him) we thereby propos'd to receive him into ministerial communion? did we indeed persecute those who differ from us, or force them into a compliance by the engines of Ruth and Wheel? this wrou'd have a popish complexion; but have we done any thing of this sort? no, we leave them to themselves when we can't in conscience be of them.

Again, shall the church have no power, least it should grow to the claim and exercise of all power? this argument wou'd be as good for Anarchy, and confusion in the state, as in the church; for some have abused church-power, and become tyranical & fatal; then be no such thing as government? in a word; we neither claim a power to make new laws, nor to add new dimensions to the laws of creation; for the government of this church, but only a power to apply them, and to see his laws put in execution as far as he has given us directions, and that by the infliction of such penalties as the scripture suggests; it is therefore a bad way of drawing conclusions, from a scriptural limited authority, to infer an unscriptural exorbitant and legislative power.



